

**From:** Mbabaliye, Theogene <Mbabaliye.Theogene@epa.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, June 23, 2023 2:36 PM  
**To:** Ludwig, Eric - FS, WA <eric.ludwig@usda.gov>  
**Cc:** Hendrix, Laurie <Hendrix.Laurie@epa.gov>; comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-threerivers@usda.gov  
**Subject:** EPA comments on the Draft EA for Dollar Mountain Restoration Project

Mr. Ludwig:

EPA Region 10 has conducted a limited review of the U.S. Forest Service's Draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed Dollar Mountain Restoration Project on the Three Rivers Ranger District of the Colville National Forest (EPA R10 Project Number 23-0023-USDA). EPA conducted this review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act and our authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. The CAA Section 309 role is unique to EPA and requires EPA to review and comment publicly on any proposed federal action subject to NEPA's environmental assessment requirement.

According to the DEA document, the proposed project will move the area to healthy conditions by restoring aquatic systems and improving their functions and reducing hazardous fuels. While project impacts will likely be beneficial in the long-term, it is possible that there will also be temporary and short-term adverse impacts due to project activities such as road decommissioning and use of access roads, and replacement of culverts, etc. Although the project will not result in significant adverse impacts, EPA recommends the Final EA/FONSI include more clarifying information on the following topics:

#### **Compliance with applicable environmental and other laws, and Executive Orders**

Include a discussion on this topic in the Final EA to show how the project will address applicable laws and E.Os. Specifically, discuss how the project will meet Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act requirements, including anticipated permits, certifications, and other approvals for the project. For example, the proposed project may exacerbate impacts to water quality within already impaired waters and sub-watersheds on the project area due to exceedances of water quality standards including temperature and sediment. As a result, the project may need to obtain a CWA Section 401 certification from Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology). Similarly, the project may need approval for proposed prescribed burns that may result in local air quality deterioration, even if temporarily. Among applicable E.Os., indicate how the project will address E.O. 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*. The DEA does not currently include information on communities that may be impacted by the project, nature of impacts, and how the impacts will be addressed. In identifying environmental justice and climate concerns of communities impacted by the proposed project, EPA further recommends use of the EJScreen Mapping Tool (<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>) as a helpful way to identify where and the type of EJ concerns that may occur in the project area.

#### **List of agencies and people consulted**

EPA recommends that the FEA include all relevant agencies and organizations to consult with on the project, subject, and outcomes of these consultations. EPA notes, for example, that Ecology is not among the agencies to consult with; yet the project will likely impact water and air quality. Therefore, the FEA needs to include information on plans to coordinate with Ecology and all

affected tribes to assure that state and tribal water and air resources are protected from impacts associated with the proposed project.

Concerning consultation with tribal entities, EPA encourages the USFS to consult with and incorporate feedback from the Tribes when making decisions regarding the project. According to the DEA, resources owned or used by the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Spokane Tribe, and Kalispel Tribe will be impacted by the project. EPA appreciates the USFS effort to inform these tribal entities about the project, and the partnership with the Confederated Tribes on the project. However, more outreach to other tribes may be warranted so all tribes are meaningfully engaged in this project.

Because there are fish bearing streams and federal and state protected species on the project area, EPA recommends the FEA include information on working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and as appropriate, with Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, including recommended measures to reduce risks and protect biota and habitat.

### **The NEPA Process**

As required under NEPA, EPA recommends the EA for this project include analysis of a No Action Alternative, and a comparison of related impacts to those of the Proposed Action. This comparison is important because it shows decision-makers and the public what would happen if the proposed action was not taken. As such, analysis of the No Action Alternative is not the same as analysis of the affected environment or existing conditions because the No Action Alternative assumes that the affected environment or the conditions will change, such as due to continuing management actions, in the absence of the proposed action. EPA appreciates information provided in the DEA on Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study as required under NEPA.

### **Project monitoring and adaptive management**

EPA recommends that the FEA for the project:

- Include a monitoring program designed to assess impacts from the project and effectiveness of mitigation measures.
- Indicate in the document how the monitoring program will be used as an effective feedback mechanism to ensure environmental objectives will be met throughout the project period. For example, monitor criteria pollutants during prescribed burns and take corrective action if pollutant levels exceed standards or pose risk to human health and the environment. The DEA also indicates many subwatersheds are currently functioning poorly or at risk and monitoring of the project will reveal whether these conditions are improving or not. If not, additional management actions may be needed to meet environmental objectives, such as improved water quality conditions and fish habitat.
- Discuss lessons learned from past practices in implementing similar projects, identify new challenges, such as climate change, and incorporate this information to help improve the design and management of the proposed project.

Please let me know if you have questions about our comments.

Theo Mbabaliye, Ph.D.

**NEPA Reviewer, Mining Sector Lead**

USEPA R10

Policy & Environmental Review Branch

1200 6th Ave., Suite 155, 14-D12

Seattle, WA 98101-3140

Phone: (206) 553-6322

***Submit NEPA environmental review documents to [R10-NEPA@epa.gov](mailto:R10-NEPA@epa.gov)***